

## Woodturning in King's Cliffe past

Records back to the early 1600s show a significant number of turners and spoon-makers, and occasional toymen and chairmakers working in King's Cliffe.

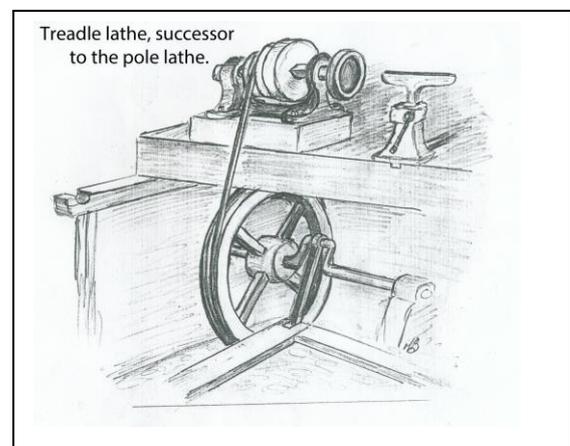
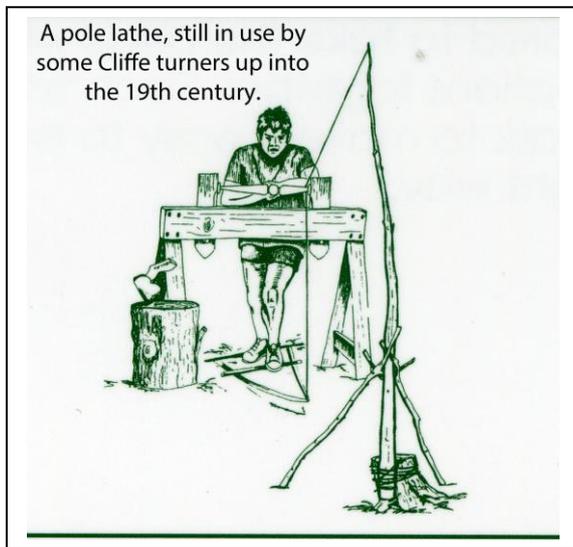
One of the earliest references to wood-turning in the village is the Will of Lawrence Scotney, 'turner', who died in 1600. The property mentioned in his Will includes his raw material sources: 'timber lyeinge in my homestead yard' and 'my woode lyeing in Morehey Sales, called Horseshowes' (*the land which is now Spa Farm*) and 'my Parke of woode lyeinge in Cliffe Park'. (*Cliffe Park was a large area of land, partly wooded until the mid-1800s on the north-east of the village*). Also mentioned as bequests are 'timber ware' and tools including a 'longe sawe'.

Through the 17th and 18th centuries, the family names which feature largely in these crafts are Bailey, Dixon, Burwell, Scotney, Sharpe, Ventross and Wade and, in lesser numbers, Carrington, Harvey, Cunnington and Giddings.

Items made by the early turners included basic essentials for domestic life – wooden trenchers and bowls to eat from, wooden spoons and forks, wooden bowls for washing – items which would later become affordable in other materials.

The earliest lathes to be used were 'pole lathes' which have hardly changed in design from Viking times. They were suitable for outdoor use. Most of the turners working in King's Cliffe would have used treadle lathes in their workshops.

Regrettably, none of the old lathes used in the village has survived.



The woodturning trade in King's Cliffe was at its height in the mid 1800s. In 1851, the census recorded 33 woodturners and four spoon-makers. By 1891 numbers had fallen to 20 woodturners/carvers and ten years later there were just thirteen.

Articles in various newspapers and magazines over the years have implied that woodturning was a flourishing 'industry' here. For example, the Peterborough Advertiser of 30th October 1909 claimed that "in its halcyon days ... there were at least 50 good firms engaged in wood turning'. In reality the typical woodturner was a 'home worker', his treadle lathe, tools and seasoned timber being housed in a small outbuilding or workshop. Such work was inevitably on a small scale. Exceptions to this in the late 19th century were the larger

workshops of William Bollans and Dixon and Co, both of which had steam-driven lathes capable of turning out items in greater quantities, and the wholesaling business of J Bailey and Son.

Wooden spoon makers were always mentioned separately from woodturners in the King's Cliffe Census returns. Writing in 1712, historian John Morton said:

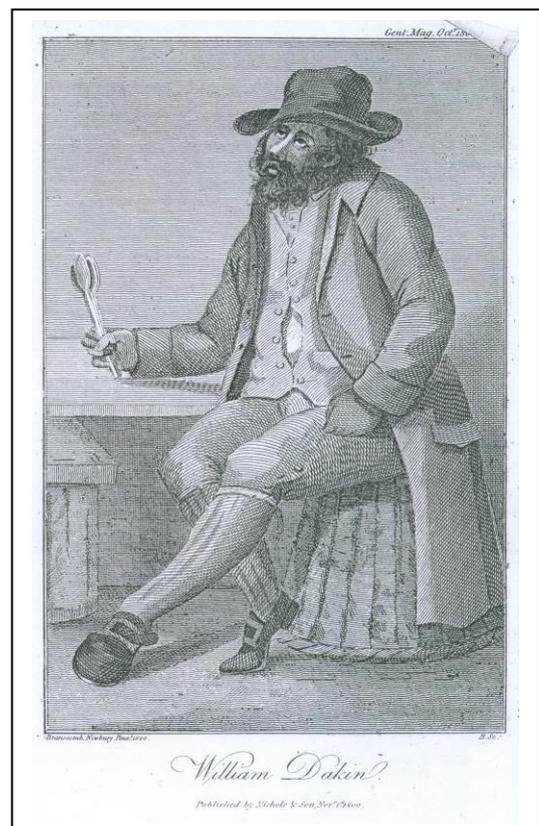
“At King’s Cliffe, a town of no great bigness, there were, when I wrote this, above 20 tradesmen whose employment was the turning of dishes and spoons. The latter is a distinct trade of itself and tools they have appropriate to it. There is scarce any town in England wherein this sort of Handicraft is so much possessed or is managed with so great dexterity as it is here.”

The spoon-makers used a ‘knife’ to hollow out the bowls of spoons: this was a blade, bent in the shape of a bow and fastened at both ends to rods which revolved on a special lathe. The wood from which the spoon was to be turned was held in a vice beneath and screwed higher or lower as required.

In the early days, domestic woodenware made in King’s Cliffe was sold widely by travelling hawkers, who came to the village to stock up with items made by the turners over the winter months. They would go first to the Mid-Lent Fair in Stamford, then the Uppingham Fair and onwards, travelling widely from village to village, selling as they went. One such hawker was William Dakin, who lived in Park Street. He was an eccentric character as described in ‘The Gentleman’s Magazine’ of October 1800. It was his habit to load up his donkeys with King’s Cliffe woodware and travel the country selling these goods – from which it was said he amassed a considerable fortune. The picture (below right) of William Dakin is reproduced from ‘The Gentleman’s Magazine’ of October 1800. It was drawn when he was travelling to Fairs in the Reading area and shows him holding two wooden spoons.

By the latter part of the 19th century, most Cliffe woodenware was being sold wholesale and the railway which came to Cliffe in 1879 gave the woodturners greater access to a wider market. One of the wholesale firms was J Bailey & Sons. They specialised in dairyware, adding carved decoration to such things as butter prints, runners and moulds. Finished items were sent by train to wholesale firms in Peterborough, Glasgow and elsewhere. Special orders were supplied, many items being carved with the customer’s name or special design.

J Bailey & Sons won a Silver Medal in the 1882 Peterborough exhibition and First Prize in the 1888 Derbyshire exhibition for excellent workmanship and design. In 1887, an order from Buckingham Palace was placed with them for a butter print bearing Her Majesty’s Arms, to be carved in box wood.



William Bollans exhibited at the International Exhibition of 1862 in London, where he received Honourable Mention. A wide range of products was made in his steam turnery in Park Street (see below).

# Articles Manufactured and Sold by WILLIAM BOLLANS

|  |          |   |          |
|--|----------|---|----------|
| <b>BUTTER PRINTS.</b><br>Common size, 1 oz.<br>Two ounce.....<br>Quarter lb.....<br>Half lb.....<br>One lb.....  | per doz. | Twenty-inch<br>Twenty two inch  | per doz. |
| <b>DITTO IN CASES.</b><br>Common size.....<br>Two ounce.....<br>Quarter lb.....<br>Half lb.....<br>One lb.....   |          | <b>SCREW TAPS.</b><br>Small.....<br>Small Middle....<br>Middle.....<br>Large.....<br>Extra.....   |          |
| <b>BUTTER MOULDS.</b><br>Small size.....<br>Middle.....<br>Large.....  |          | <b>POWDER BOXES.</b><br>Three-in screw lids<br>Three and a half-in  |          |
| <b>WOOD SPOONS.</b><br>Small.....<br>Nine-inch.....<br>Eleven and a half-inch<br>Twelve-inch Pickle<br>Fourteen-inch....<br>Sixteen-inch.....<br>Eighteen-inch.... |          | <b>SPICE BOXES.</b><br>Small 3-lift.....<br>Middle 4-lift....<br>Common large 4-lift<br>Extra large 5-lift<br>Ditto 6-lift.....<br>Butter Runners..   |          |
|  |          | <b>MISCELLANEOUS.</b><br>Scotch Hands....<br>Potato Mashers..<br>Lemon Squeezers<br>Yokes.....<br>Toys, sorted.....<br>Varnished Pepper<br>Boxes..... |          |

|   |          |   |          |
|---|----------|---|----------|
| Varnished Salts....<br>Varnished Egg Cups<br>Quarter lb. Twine<br>Boxes.....<br>Half lb.....<br>One lb.....<br>Lettered Bread<br>Plates.....<br>Carved Plates....<br>Plain Bread ditto..<br>Butter Boards and<br>Knives.....<br>Wine Funnels....<br>Vinegar Funnels..<br>Punch Ladles....<br>Salad Spoons and<br>Forks.....<br>Turned Clothes Pegs<br>Spile Pegs.....<br>Nutcracks.....<br>Nutmeasures....<br>Watchmen's Rattles<br>small.....<br>Ditto, middle....<br>Ditto, large.....<br>Spell Cups.....<br>Flour Dredgers...<br>Thirteen-in. Butter<br>Knives.....<br>Nine-in. ditto....<br>Eleven-in ditto...<br>Cash Bowls....<br>Paste Boards..... | per doz. | Small Cork Tap..<br>Middle ditto.....<br>White Egg Cups..<br>Four-in Toilet<br>Dishes.....<br>Four and a half-inch<br>Toilet Dishes..<br>Shaving Boxes..<br>Soap Dishes.....<br>Three-inch Tooth<br>Powder Boxes..<br>Carved Biscuit<br>Rollers.....<br>Paste Rolling Pins<br>Small Crimping<br>Boards & Rollers<br>Middle ditto.....<br>Large ditto.....<br>Oval Butter Prints<br>Half lb. ditto....<br>One lb. ditto....<br>Tun Dish Spouts..<br>Small Plain Taps<br>Middle ditto.....<br>Large ditto.....<br>Half-pint Butter<br>Churns.....<br>One pint ditto...<br>One quart ditto..<br>Two-quart ditto..<br>Money Boxes....<br>Thimble Cases....<br>Skimming Dishes | per doz. |
|---|----------|---|----------|

Printed at the "Post" Printing Works, Stamford.

The advent of aluminium in 1870 and cheaper ceramic and enamelled ware, as well as the later development of plastics, brought a rapid decline in demand for ordinary domestic woodenware. The woodturners largely stuck to their traditional methods and by the early part of the 20th century, turning no longer provided a living – only six turners are listed in the 1906 Kelly's trade directory. J Bailey & Sons' price list from that year is extensive (see below).

First Prize Medal, Peterboro' Exhibition, 1882.

ESTABLISHED 1789.



UNDER ROYAL PATRONAGE.

**J. BAILEY & SONS,**  
WOOD TURNERS & CARVERS,  
KING'S CLIFFE,  
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.



First Prize Silver  
shire Show,

— 1906 —

WHOLESALE PRICE LIST.

| BUTTER PRINTS.               |     | Per doz. | WOOD SPOONS.        |     | Per doz. | PLOUGH HANDLES.   |                        | Per doz.              |
|------------------------------|-----|----------|---------------------|-----|----------|---|------------------------|-----------------------|
| SINGLE.                      |     | s. d.    | Small               | ... | 0 8      | Common  | ...                    | 0 9                   |
| One Ounce                    | ... | 1 8      | 10in. Saucepan      | ... | 1 0      | Small   | ...                    | 0 8                   |
| Two                          | ... | 2 2      | 11in. Padding       | ... | 1 2      | CASH BOWLS.   |                        |                       |
| 1/2 Pound                    | ... | 2 6      | 12in. Pickle        | ... | 1 2      | 3in.  | ...                    | 1 6                   |
| 1/4 "                        | ... | 3 0      | 14in.               | ... | 2 0      | 4in.  | ...                    | 2 0                   |
| 1 "                          | ... | 4 0      | 16in.               | ... | 2 6      | 4 1/2in.  | ...                    | 2 6                   |
| BUTTER PRINTS. (In Case).    |     |          | 18in.               | ... | 3 6      | 5in.  | ...                    | 3 0                   |
| One Ounce                    | ... | 2 6      | 20in.               | ... | 4 6      | 6in.  | ...                    | 4 0                   |
| Two                          | ... | 3 6      | 22in.               | ... | 5 6      | MISCELLANEOUS.  |                        |                       |
| 1/2 Pound                    | ... | 5 0      | 24in.               | ... | 6 6      | Butter Beaters  | ...                    | pair 7 0              |
| 1/4 "                        | ... | 8 0      | MACHINE HANDLES.    |     |          | Butter Runners  | ...                    | pair 2 6              |
| 1 "                          | ... | 11 0     | 12in.               | ... | 2 0      | Scotch Hands  | ...                    | 4/0 per doz. pair 5 6 |
| OVAL BUTTER PRINTS.          |     |          | 14in.               | ... | 2 3      | Potato Mashers  | ...                    | 2 0                   |
| 1/2 Pound                    | ... | 5 0      | 16in.               | ... | 2 6      | Lemon Squeezers   | ...                    | 7/- and 9 0           |
| 1 "                          | ... | 7 0      | HAY KNIFE HANDLES.  |     |          | Varnished Pepper Boxes                                      | ...                    | 2 6                   |
| PRINTS.                      |     |          | 12in.               | ... | 2 0      | " Salts   | ...                    | 1 1                   |
| Barrel Prints, 1lb.          | ... | 15 0     | 14in.               | ... | 2 3      | " Egg Cnps  | ...                    | 0 8                   |
| " " 1lb.                     | ... | 12 0     | 16in.               | ... | 2 6      | Wine Funnels  | ...                    | 3 0                   |
| Short Barrel, 1lb.           | ... | 15 0     | SCREW TAPS.         |     |          | Vinegar   | ...                    | 1 6                   |
| " " 1lb.                     | ... | 12 0     | Small               | ... | 2 0      | Turned Clothes Pegs   | ...                    | 0 3                   |
| Side Handle Prints (Screwed) | ... | 7 0      | Second              | ... | 2 3      | Spile Pegs  | ...                    | 0 6                   |
| BUTTER MOULDS.               |     |          | Middle              | ... | 3 0      | Nut Cranks  | ...                    | 0 8                   |
| Small Size                   | ... | 7 0      | Large               | ... | 4 0      | Thimble Cases, white wood                                   | ...                    | 1 0                   |
| Middle "                     | ... | 10 0     | Extra               | ... | 6 0      | Paste Rolling Pins, 14in.                                   | ...                    | 2 0                   |
| Large "                      | ... | 14 0     | CORK TAPS.          |     |          | " " 16in.   | ...                    | 2 6                   |
| BUTTER KNIVES.               |     |          | Small               | ... | 2 6      | Churn Cups  | ...                    | 3 0                   |
| 13in.                        | ... | 2 6      | Middle              | ... | 3 0      | Turned Spouts   | ...                    | 3 0                   |
| 11in.                        | ... | 2 0      | Large               | ... | 3 6      | Soap Dishes   | ...                    | 1/- and 1 2           |
| 9in.                         | ... | 1 0      | SPICE BOXES.        |     |          | Spell Cnps  | ...                    | 3 6                   |
|                              |     |          | Small 3-lift        | ... | 7 0      | Flour Dredgers  | ...                    | 3 6                   |
|                              |     |          | Middle 4-lift       | ... | 10 0     | Bottle Openers  | ...                    | 0 8                   |
|                              |     |          | Common Large 4-lift | ... | 14 0     | Butter Boards (10 by 8) 1/8 per pair. Other sizes to order. | ...                    | 9 0                   |
|                              |     |          | Extra Large 4-lift  | ... | 18 0     | Long Scotch Hands   | per doz. pair, 7/- and | 9 0                   |
|                              |     |          | " " 6-lift          | ... | 24 0     | All kinds of Butter Tools, Knives, &c. made to order.       |                        |                       |

Another member of the Bailey family, William Henry Bailey, who also kept The Turner's Arms public house in West Street, was the last of the old working woodturners in King's Cliffe. He worked up to his death in 1941.

### Materials

The woodturners used a variety of timbers – beech, walnut, horse chestnut, sweet chestnut, lime, hazel, hornbeam, maple and sycamore. Sycamore was particularly suited for domestic items which needed to hold foods or liquids. Boxwood and ash were used if great strength was needed, and oak, yew and cherry for detailed carving and decoration. All their timber had to be allowed to dry gradually, a process known as seasoning, before it could be worked.

The picture (right), from The Woodworker Magazine of October 1907, shows the workshop of woodturner, carver and toyman John Ventross Green which was in the Pytchell west of the churchyard. The churchyard wall was a useful place to leave his timber whilst it seasoned!

John Ventross Green died in 1933 aged 76. His obituary in the Stamford Mercury referred to him as a skilled maker of wooden toys, including model gypsy caravans, beautifully carved and painted. In an interview for the paper in 1927, he had talked of his work as a woodturner:

“I began by making egg cups and money boxes and bowls. But soon I passed on to other articles. In fact, it was not long before I could make anything that was required – pepper pots, lemon squeezers, spoons, plough handles, flour dredgers, clothes pegs, bread boards, screw taps for beer barrels and also for use in the dye works in Manchester, humming tops for children, soap boxes, salt holders, spice boxes, paste boards, potato mashers, rolling pins and butter prints. I carve the designs on butter prints and bread boards. All my turning is done on a treadle lathe.”

Of prices, he said: “In the old days of the industry, a journeyman woodturner was paid only ten or twelve shillings a week. Egg cups were made for four shillings and four shillings and sixpence a gross and sold from five shillings to six shillings a gross. He himself had made wooden spoons for seven pence a dozen, pepper boxes for one shilling and sixpence a dozen, and small screw taps for one shilling a dozen.”

He regretted that the business had declined since around 1900, largely because of the growing popularity of enamelled household ware.

Our heritage collection of woodware includes examples of many of these items which you can see by visiting our Heritage Centre.

